



Synthetic Marijuana/"Spice" or "K2"

November 15, 2010

Synthetic Marijuana



- What is synthetic marijuana?
 - Artificially created chemicals that are sprayed on legal plant material, dried, and then sold as “incense.”
- The chemicals used can be any one of a number of synthetic cannabinoids that were first created in the late 80’s and early 90’s.
 - They were synthesized by biochemists that were studying cannabinoid receptors in mice brains.
 - Many are completely artificial, and have no chemical similarity to THC or other marijuana compounds.
 - They were never intended for human use.

Synthetic Marijuana



- There is evidence that the use of synthetic marijuana is a growing trend, both in Virginia and across the country.
 - There have been a number of articles in Virginia newspapers recently, reporting on its increased use.
 - Nationwide, the American Association of Poison Control Centers has reported more than 1,800 calls about synthetic marijuana this year.
 - 70 calls in Virginia where use was admitted.

Synthetic Marijuana



- Because they are such recent drugs, and were never intended for medical use, almost none of them have been included in the federal government's list of Scheduled substances.
- As they are not listed in Virginia's Drug Control Act either, they are currently legal to possess and use.

Synthetic Marijuana



- Just this year, nine states have passed legislation to criminalize synthetic marijuana:
 - Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.
- At least three states criminalized synthetic marijuana prior to 2010:
 - Arkansas, Iowa, and North Dakota.
- There is pending legislation in at least four states:
 - New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

Synthetic Marijuana



- The Virginia Department of Forensic Science has crafted a list of nine chemicals that should be added to Virginia's list of Schedule I drugs.
- The Virginia Board of Pharmacy has been consulted on this list.

Policy Issue



- Senators Mark Herring, Tommy Norment, Edward Houck, and Ralph Smith, and Delegates Paula Miller, Glenn Oder, and Scott Garrett have all pre-filed bills that would penalize the possession, use, and distribution of synthetic marijuana in a manner similar to marijuana:
 - Possession or distribution of less than ½ ounce, Class 1 misdemeanor; ½ ounce to five pounds, Class 5 felony; more than five pounds, or manufacturing any quantity, 5 to 30 years.
- Should the penalty for possession, use, or distribution of small amounts of synthetic marijuana be treated as a Schedule I drug crime, like cocaine, or should it be a misdemeanor, as for marijuana?



Discussion